

World War II and Me

By
Emma Frischer

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World War II and Me , is the true story about my life. It is the story of how I escaped from the German occupied territory in W.W.II. I ran for four months on foot and in the cold. I was hungry, without the change of clothes, trying to hide my identity because I was Jewish. My autobiography is at the Archives of Wright States University in Dayton, Ohio. where I lived for many years.

My story begins when I was eighteen years old. I had been living in Russia, where I was born. I was studying at a technical school in Minsk, Russia for four years and was about to get my diploma as an architect technician. Three days before my graduation W.W.II started. It was June 22, 1941.

I was at school finishing up my project that I had worked on for the past few months. At twelve o'clock noon, the radio announced that the German airplanes were bombing our cities. It was just a terrible shock for all of us. For me, it was like a black monster that was coming up from underground and was going to eat me up,

That night we were not allowed to go to our dormitories because they were just wooden barracks and therefore not very safe. They were located one mile away from our four story brick school building. Also, the barracks were located next to a railroad station which would be the first sight bombed. All of the students were to go to the basement of our school which had nothing to sit on, no food or water...just a cement floor.

Early in the morning we got an order from the school's authorities to run from the city to the east. We had to run on foot without anything, only what we had on our backs. On the highway were thousands and thousands of people walking east. Nobody walked in the opposite direction. There were only a few cars full of people also going east. The German planes were flying low and shooting from automatic shotguns onto the people. When this happened we would run to the side of the road, hiding in the wheat fields that were growing along the side of the road. It took me three days of walking to get to my parents. They lived in a small town away from the city of Minsk where I was studying.

My father, Rachmiel Birger was a pharmacist and my mother Judes Birger, was his assistant. They were very happy to see me alive. There were five siblings in our family, four girls and one boy. However, at the time that the war started we were grown. Our ages ranged from twenty-four to eighteen.

My oldest sister Liza was an epileptic. She always lived at home with our parents. My next sister Cima, was a pharmacist like our father. She had just finished pharmacy school the prior year and worked at a nearby pharmacy.

Our only brother, Samson, was born after Cima. He was already fighting against the Germans in the war. Before the war started he was in the service of the Soviet Union Army and was about to be released. After my brother, was my sister Kune. She was studying in Moscow at a university. I was the youngest child in our family and my name is Emma.

Soon after I came home the Germans occupied our small town. They came to the pharmacy, took what they wanted or needed.

Some German soldiers showed us with their hands, grabbing their throats, that this is what would happen to us. Others said that it was a pity that we had not left before they had arrived. However, it was not possible for us to have left because we didn't have transportation. My mother had medical problems. My sister, Liza was also a sickly. My father was sixty-five years old, and at that time that was considered quite old.

Right from the beginning the Germans put up large posters that read that all the Jews including the babies and the old people had to have yellow patches sewn on their clothes. These patches would allow for them to be easily identified. If this was not done, they would be shot on the spot.

We had heard rumors that the Nazi's were coming with trucks and taking away all of the Jews. We had a cellar in the house. It was just a hole in the ground under one small room, with a lid closing it from the house. It was used just for storing potatoes. To enter the cellar you had to use a very steep ladder. My parents could not get inside, but all of us could. We were hoping that it would never happen, but in case the Nazi's came, we could hide in it.

One day they came quietly. It was the holiest day of the Jewish religion. It was the 25th of September, 1941, Yom Kippur. They came to the door of our house and screamed, "Rous!" It means to get out. We had a barn and behind it were fields. I ran out of the house to the barn, hoping to escape. The Nazi's were already there. They caught me, hit me over my head and walked me to the street where my parents and two sisters were waiting. Waiting at the street was the entire Jewish population of our small town of Uchwaly.

I was hysterical. I knew that in a few minutes I would be killed. Our father cried that my sister Kune in Moscow, would have nobody in the whole world. Kune was always a sickly girl, and this was the reason that she had left for Moscow. She had needed surgery for her leg and eyes.

From the street we were taken by the Germans to an empty school room. We were kept there by a few guards with riffles. We were not allowed to speak or move. After a couple of hours in this classroom they let us go. Our home was ransacked. At this point we didn't care about any of our belongings. We were just happy to be alive.

That same day during the afternoon they had come to the pharmacy looking for oil to clean their riffles. After cleaning their riffles, they took away our father. They also took a seventy-five year old man that had run away from Minsk in the beginning of the war. This old man had asked my mother to let him stay with us because he could not run any longer. The Nazi's eventually took all of the Jewish men from our town. We were told by the Germans that they took the men to do work, but they never returned.

Later that same day, a Russian neighbor came over to our house. He told our mother that my sister Cima and I should leave our house and go away. My mother said that there wasn't any safe place for us to go. The Germans were everywhere. He said that wherever we would go would be better than staying at home, because everyone in the town knew that we were Jews. The man said that he was once in a bad situation too and that he managed to get out of it by hiding. He did not explain what had happened and we didn't ask.

After he left, he sent in his wife. She brought us some old clothes and shoes that the poorest of the poor wore. They were made from the trunk of a willow tree. We had to wrap rugs around our feet to hold on the rugs and shoes. The straps were actually a part of the shoes called Laptzi. The lady showed us how to put them on. She also brought us babushkas (scarves) to cover our dark curly hair. The Russian girls mostly had blonde or dark blonde hair and wore white babushkas. Early in the morning my sister Cima and I dressed in these clothes and said good-bye to our mother and Liza. We started out into the woods that were very close to our house. We hoped that we would be back within a short time. We didn't have radios, newspapers, or telephones. We didn't know how much territory was occupied by the Germans.

We walked east all day on the small village dirt roads. After a long day of walking we came to a field where people were harvesting potatoes. We asked them if we could help them and they agreed. We hoped that by helping them that they would give us some food and maybe a place to stay overnight, and indeed they did. While we were working, we realized that the people harvesting the potatoes were Jewish. My sister and I started to tell them what had happened in our town. We told them that they should run to wherever they could. They got angry at us. They didn't believe us and said that we were communists spreading propaganda. So Cima and I started to doubt if we were doing the right thing, running to nowhere. Perhaps we were panicking and should go back home. We stayed one more night. In the morning we started to debate again which way we should turn going back home or to continue walking east to get out of the German occupied territory.

One man heard us talking and he came closer towards us. We recognized him. He was a Jewish neighbor of ours who used to repair our shoes. People from our town called him "The Judge", because he was very smart. He used to be very sick for a long time and all of a sudden he was on his feet and looked well. He told us that we had no one to return home to. He said that Liza had gotten into a fight with a German soldier and thrown a bucket of water at him. The soldier shot her on the spot and also killed my mother. We started to cry hysterically and decided to go on walking the next day.

As we walked, we found another field with people harvesting potatoes. We asked them if they could use help. While we were working we tried to find out the names of the villages so in case somebody would ask us where we were going we could give them a name. We continued doing this until there weren't anymore potatoes to harvest and it became very cold. At this time Cima told me she was tired of walking and decided to go into the villages asking people if they needed a seamstress. She had learned on vacation how to sew from a dressmaker. She hoped that some people would have a sewing machines and she could do some work at their homes. I didn't know how to make dresses and I wanted to get out of the occupied territory. I thought that Cima's idea might be a better idea than mine because where was I going? To the front where I could be easily killed and how could I cross to the other side? So, we kissed good bye and we each went on a different path. I regret it to this day because we never saw each other again.

I continued on alone going east. I had to beg people to let me in to spend the night because there was snow on the ground, and it was very cold and windy. I was prepared to tell them if they asked that I was just let out of jail and now going home to my parents that lived a few villages away. To be in jail in Russia was not much of a shame. Most of the people at one time or another went to jail because they were employed by the government. They weren't paid enough to buy the food that they needed. In order not to go hungry, people stole the necessities needed to live. The stolen goods would then be sold on the open market for a very high price because these items couldn't be found in the stores. When they were caught they went to jail.

Again I stopped at the end of the day and asked the lady of a house for a place to sleep (the men were of fighting in the war). She told me that tonight was not her turn and showed me to the house whose turn it was. First, I did not understand but later I learned that the majority of the villagers decided that if a stranger comes along and is in need of a place to stay, each home had to let him or her in and give them something to eat. The reason for that was that the Russian Army in the beginning of the war was defeated by the Germans. The soldiers were asking villagers to exchange their uniforms for old civilian clothes, and were walking like I was to find a place to stay overnight and be fed. The soldiers would continue to walk until they found their lost platoon, relatives, or a temporary job. Therefore, this was an advantage for me.

However, my biggest problem was that the villagers didn't have bathing facilities in their homes. I couldn't wash myself and I didn't have a change of clothes. I had lice crawling all over me. My shoes were torn and I couldn't ask for any spare clothes because the villagers didn't have these necessities for themselves. My cheeks were frost bitten, and my toes were sore. One of my breast had an open wound and the lice were crawling over it. But I had no way to help myself. I had to go on. Night after night I prayed that God would help me, and thanked him that so far I was alive. One night I had a dream that a Russian airplane was flying low. I could see the words on it saying that soon we will be back. This gave me encouragement to continue, hoping that this would really happen.

Once I begged a woman into letting me take a sponge bath. She let me and said that maybe her husband was somewhere walking like me and hoped that someone would help him too. I washed myself and my clothes by hand the best that I could. She gave me an old sheet to cover myself until the clothes dried. I was very thankful for this but the lice didn't die, I continued to have them.

The living condition in a Russian village consisted of only a one room house. This room served as the kitchen, living room, dinning room and bedroom. There weren't chairs, but only benches that attached to the walls, one table and big bed where the whole family slept. There would be a big oven where food was cooked and bread was baked. The only food that was available was what the people could produce themselves. The oven also was the only source of heat for the house. On the top of the oven there was room for a couple more people to sleep. A cradle hung from the ceiling over the bed for babies. There wasn't any plumbing and water had to be brought in from an outside well. Kerosene lamps inside the house were the only source of light. The out-houses were sometimes quite a distance from the house and there was no toilet paper. To bathe people used a community bath house which was heated only once in awhile.

Once, I stayed overnight at a house, and the old man of the house noticed my torn shoes. My toes were barely covered. He said that he had a pair of old shoes that he would have repaired and give to me. I was very happy and thanked him. He took them to be repaired. He returned and gave them to me. I put them on. They were much too big for me, but they weren't torn. After I put them on he asked me to have sex with him. I ran out of his house and went to the next house where gypsies lived. A lady let me in and in the morning asked me to go begging with her in the village, and I did. While begging in the village I smelled the smoke from the chimneys and wondered if I would ever have my own ~~cottage~~ CORNER TO LIVE

The Jewish people pronounced sounds and words differently from the Russians, especially the "R" sound. Anyone would be able to identify my nationality by the way I pronounced the "R". So I practiced while I

walked and eventually I was able to pronounce it more like the Russians. I walked only by the small village roads because the Germans used the highways. I hoped that I would never encounter them. But once I had to cross a bridge because there was no other way to go east. When I came closer to the bridge I noticed that people were crossing it in both directions without any problems. At first I didn't notice that a German soldier was guarding the bridge. Nobody was being stopped. But when I wanted to cross the German soldier stopped me and asked if I was a Jew. I felt cold all over. My legs became weak and face probably showed that I was in shock. I could not say a word. I only shook my head to imply that no, I am not a Jew. He asked the people who were crossing the bridge if I was a Jew. They told him that they didn't know me. The guard shook his finger at me and told me to go on.

One more time I was stopped by the Germans. I was walking and heard them shouting, "Halt!" I knew that it meant to stop. I looked back and saw a civilian man walking in the same direction. I didn't know if the shouting was meant for me or for the man. So I continued to walk even more slowly, looking back at times. The German soldier took the man and me to a small German office. They gave us work to do. They had already given work to other Russian men. They waited for somebody to come to take us to their larger headquarters. Later that day, when it started getting dark, a German soldier came and took us to their larger office. We were put in a wagon drawn by horses. The German soldier walked behind the wagon. I was not comfortable sitting so close next to the men in the wagon. I asked the German if I could get down and walk. He agreed. While walking I was talking to the German. I don't remember what I was talking about. Even though I couldn't speak German, I could understand most of it since I spoke Yiddish. After walking for while, the German soldier told the men to stop the horse and for all of them to get out of the wagon. There were about eight men plus myself. He said in broken Russian to run. He said that nobody would see us. We thought that he would shoot us while we were running. But instead he sat down on the ground and lit a cigarette. Everybody ran in a different direction. I went looking for a place to stay overnight. Since it was dark I didn't realize that I had gone to the same house that I had stayed in the previous night. They were very surprised to see me. They were very nice people and again they let me stay the night with them.

Many times while walking, I would get very tired and sleepy. The snow was bothering my eyes. I wanted to lie down in the snow and fall asleep, but I knew that if I did that I would likely freeze to death. I continued on trying to overcome my tiredness by thinking about that future, and hopefully the good times that it would bring.

One night the sound of strong artillery shooting was so close that it woke me up. The windows in the house were shaking. The shooting lasted all night. Nobody in the house could sleep. In the morning I left to continue walking. All of a sudden I noticed Russian soldiers in uniforms. I couldn't believe my eyes. I asked them if they were real soldiers of the Red Army. They said that they were. They had just broken through the front line and had gotten behind the German Army in order to surround them. I hoped that they would help me and that I wouldn't have to walk anymore. But they had their own problems and they didn't offer me any help. I continued to walk.

Now I didn't have to be afraid to say that I was Jewish. I told the lady of house where I was spending the night that I had a sister in Moscow, and that I wanted to join her because I had no other place to go. The lady was very interested in what I told her. She told me that she had a daughter living in Moscow. Since the war had started she had been unable to contact her. She said that if I was ever in Moscow to please deliver a letter to her daughter. She wanted to let her daughter know that she was still alive and that she had gone through a lot under the occupation. I promised her to do so if I was ever lucky enough to get to Moscow. The lady wrote a short letter to her daughter and gave me money for the trolley fare. I put the money and letter in my torn coat pocket, and continued walking the next morning.

The day was snowy and very windy. There was so much snow on the ground that I had to lift my feet very high with every step. I heard a truck coming behind me. I stepped aside to let it pass, but it stopped. The driver asked me why I was walking in such terrible weather. I told him a shorten version of my story. He told me that if I didn't have a passport proving that I was a resident of Moscow, that I wouldn't be allowed to enter the city. In fact they might arrest me, accusing me of being a spy. In Russia, all people carried a passport just like each citizen of the United States carries a driver license. I told the driver that I must get to my sister in Moscow, because she was the only relative that I had left. He suggested that I climb into one of the metal drums that was on the truck. He told me to cover myself up with the rugs that I would find on the truck. He also told me that if I was discovered by the Russian controllers in Moscow that checked the vehicles entering the city, that I should say that he knew nothing about my hiding in the truck. I promised and with difficulty I hid myself in the drum on his truck. I had to sit inside the drum and it was quite uncomfortable and very cold. But I knew that soon I would be in the comfort of my sister's place and was able to calm myself.

It didn't actually take too long, but it seemed as though it was forever when the driver stopped the truck. A man's voice asked him to show his papers. After he showed his papers, he asked him what was on

the truck. I heard all of this and was afraid to breathe. My whole body was shaking. I was afraid that all of my suffering would be for nothing, and that I would end up in jail without letting my sister know that I was alive. The driver calmly answered that he was going to Moscow with empty drums to pick up building materials. The guard hit one of the drums with a stick. I could hear the sound of the empty metal drum. The controller was satisfied and soon the truck was rolling again. It took quite awhile before I could feel better. Soon we arrived in the city. The driver told me that I should get off of the truck and go look for my sister. I thanked him and gave him a hug. He gave me a piece of candy, something which I hadn't had in a very long time.

I remembered the name of the street where my sister Kune lived and studied. Her dorm was in the same building as the university. I had never been in Moscow and of course had to ask for direction to take the trolley to her street. As soon as I saw her street, I ran as fast as I could to the university. However, the closer I got, I knew that something was wrong. There was no one entering or leaving the building. I noticed a big note on the door of the building. It said that all the students had been evacuated to a safer place, but it didn't say where. I rushed to an information booth. There was usually one on most of the larger streets in the city. They didn't know either where the students had gone. I told them my name and name of my sister. They said that they would try and find where the university had relocated the student to.

I didn't know what to do next. I was practically in tears. The people in the city could not imagine what I was going through unless they had also experienced living in the occupied territory. There is an old saying that a person who is not hungry can not feel the same way as a person who has never had enough food. I stood there not knowing what to do. Then I remembered the letter in my coat pocket that a woman had given to me weeks ago to deliver to her daughter, who lived in Moscow. I took out the letter and read the address. I asked people directions to her street. I looked for her street for a long time and had to take many street cars. It was very dark, but finally I found her street and apartment. I knocked at the door and a woman's voice asked me what I wanted. I said that I had a letter from her mother, but she didn't believe me. She didn't open the door, but told me that if I had letter to slip it under the door. After a short while the door opened and a young woman asked me to come in. She had recognized her mother's handwriting. She smiled at me and gave me a hug. She was sorry that her mother had gone through so much suffering, but was very happy to find out that she was alive.

She asked me if I wanted to first take a bath or eat something first. I chose to take a bath first. She brought me some clean clothes and said that she would throw mine away. I agreed to this since my clothes were dirty

and torn. She gave me hot food and we talked about her mother and me. We also talked about the other people in the occupied villages and towns. She told me that I could stay in her apartment to rest for three days, and after that I should go to an evacuation center. The center would give me a ticket to travel to another city where I would be given a job and a place to live. The woman's daughter gave me some extra clothing so that I would have a change of clothes. I was very thankful, but I was also quite sad that I had not been able to find my sister.

On the third day I left for the evacuation center. The city of Moscow didn't like having strangers. In fact they sent out of the city thousands of people when the war started. On the way to center, I saw an optical store. I needed eye glasses. My vision had never been good but since I didn't have good nutrition for such a long time, my vision had worsened. I went into the store. I told the receptionist that I needed glasses, but didn't have the money to pay for them. I told her about some of my experience and offered to pay for them by giving her my bundle of clothing. She and another employee laughed at me. They thought that I was crazy. At that time a man came out from another room. He had heard our conversation and asked me to sit down. He checked my vision. He gave me glasses and didn't want anything in return. He then asked me more about the Jews in the occupied towns. I told him everything that I knew. He was very sad. I think that he was also a Jew, but I didn't ask him. Some Jews in Russia, especially during the war, wouldn't tell anybody that didn't know them that they were Jewish. I thanked him for my glasses and went in search of the evacuation center.

Of course the glasses helped my vision and I was crying with happiness. It was now easier for me to read the street signs. I found the center. They asked me many questions and then gave me papers and a train ticket. They gave me a train ticket to a city called Tambow, which was very far away from Moscow. I had a couple of hours to wait before the train came. While waiting I was given a big slice of white bread and something else, of which I don't remember what. I ate the bread with such vigor that a young man that was also eating, gave me his portion too.

The train arrived and I got into one of the cars. There were also Russian soldiers that were traveling. One of them started talking to me. I told him my story. He said that I could go to his parents and that they would give me a place to stay. When he would come home from the service, perhaps we would have a future together. He wrote a letter to his parents and gave it to me. I took it but decided to go on to the city Tambow.

In Tambow, at the train station, I met a young girl about my age. Her name was Basia. She was from Poland and Jewish. She told me that if I wanted I could live with her. I was very happy and accepted her offer.

This worked out well because the Russian government had a rule that all people who had run away from their cities and homes because of the war, would have to be placed in the homes of the people in the city of their new destination.

Soon after my arrival, I went to an employment agency. They sent me to a medical center where people could donate blood to soldiers that had been injured in the war. I was hired to work as a receptionist. One day while working, a woman that was standing in line came up to me and told me that I would be receiving a letter. I didn't believe her and asked her why she had said that. Obviously she was very superstitious, because she said that she saw a spider coming down from the ceiling straight towards me. I thought that the woman was joking or crazy. Indeed that day I did receive a letter from my sister Kunē with a check for one hundred rubles inside. She was extremely happy to find out that I was alive. She asked me about the rest of the family. I had to write her the truth. She was still living in Moscow. During the chaos with the Germans being so close to taking over the city, the university had not informed anyone of their new location.

Shortly after receiving her letter, the Germans once again started to push back the Russian Army. I was afraid that it would all happen all over again, and that once again I would be in the occupied territory. I didn't want to take any chances. I began to look for a way to move farther away from the war. I was able to buy a train ticket to go to Central Asia, where many people were being evacuated to at the beginning of the war.

My destination was to ~~the city of~~ Kirgizia. It was a republic of the Soviet Union. Life there was very ~~difficult~~ from what I had experienced in Europe. The natives had their own language and the newcomers had never tried to learn it. They spoke very little Russian. These people wore coats and hats in the summer and winter that were made from sheep skins. These articles of clothing protected them from the heat of the sun. In the market they would sell kumis. I never found out what this was although I think it was the milk from a horse. The natives sat on the ground with their legs and feet close to their bodies. All of their merchandise was spread out on a blanket that was placed on the ground.

I traveled to a small village that had a factory that produced roped ~~ROPE~~ where I found a job. The manager of the factory let me stay at his guest house where he lived with his wife and children. Once he made a pass at me and I decided to leave.

I had heard about a sugar factory in a nearby town called Kant. I traveled there, but couldn't find a job at the sugar factory. However, in the same town was a government farm that raised sugar beets. They also specialized in producing and selling seeds for sugar beets. The seed production was on a big scale. They had special machines to clean and sort

the seeds. After cleaning and sorting the seeds, they were put into linen sacks and sold to other companies.

I had been told about the sugar beet factory from a Russian woman that I had met at the market. She had lived in the town for many years. I told her that I had just arrived and was in need of a place to stay. She offered to let me stay at her place even though it was just one room. It was furnished with just one bed and a table. She told me that I could sleep on the bare wooden floor. I found rotten green tomatoes on the floor and ate them at night when I was hungry. They were probably grown by the woman.

I was aware that newcomers to a town had to register at the police station. So I went there hoping that they might help me find a place to stay. I told them my story. They listened but I didn't see any indication that they would offer me any help. I then decided to go back to my temporary living quarters. However, they wouldn't let me leave and told me to wait until the lieutenant arrived. They wanted me to tell him my story. He didn't come that evening so they put me in jail cell. The cell was dark and smelled terrible. There were buckets for human waste. There were dirty mattresses on the filthy floor that were to be used as beds. I was called for during the night. A guard came and unlocked the cell and took me to a room where a young lieutenant was seated. He told me to tell my story. After I told him, he asked me what information did the Germans tell me to supply them with. He accused me of being a spy for the Germans! I told him that he had no right to talk to me like that. After all my suffering, walking, being scared, losing my parents and family, I couldn't believe how he could accuse me of such a thing. Instead of helping me, he terrorized me! I was shocked! I was put back into the cell. The next night, the same procedure happened again. I told him I would not make up stories just to satisfy him. After the third night I was released and went back to the home of the woman that I had met at the market. Even though my place on the floor wasn't so nice, I was very happy to return to it.

The next day I began to look for a job at a sugar beet farm. I was hired to clean and sort the ^{seeds} beets. There I met and worked with a woman and her daughter. Her daughter's name was Dora. She was about my age but appeared to be very childish or retarded. The woman wanted me to be friends with her daughter in hope that she might grow up a little. The woman invited me to stay with them. I was of course very happy with her invitation and accepted. They lived in a room with a Russian family. They were also Jewish, and had fled from Rumania where they had lived when the war had started.

One evening Dora and I were hurrying home, I heard someone call my name. It was the lieutenant that had recently terrorized me. He said,

"Comrade Birger I want to talk to you". I told Dora to wait where we were standing for me. He said that Dora should go home instead. He walked me to the police station. He asked me if I was now ready to tell the truth about the information that the Germans had given me. The war was still going on, but it was far away from where we were now. I told him that I had nothing new to tell him. I said that I had already told him everything and that there was nothing left to say. He became very angry and made me go with him to his car. He drove to the city of Frunze, which was maybe fifteen miles away from Kant. He drove to the police headquarters, and again put me into a jail cell.

That evening I was confronted by a new investigator asking the same questions. I told him that there was nothing I could tell him except that I had walked for about a thousand miles, escaping the Nazis. They had killed my parents and family. I had already been through so much suffering. I asked them why weren't helping me instead of hurting me? I cried and after that I refused to answer anymore questions.

I was kept there for two more days, and on the third day I was placed in a small office all by myself. The office door was opened and I could see people walking by. I was thinking that it would be very easy to run away and blend with the people on the street. But then I thought that they would probably catch me and arrest me for running away. So I remained seated quietly for awhile. Then the officer came in and told me I could leave, which I did. In the mean time Dora had told everyone that I had gone away with the lieutenant for three days for a good time. After hearing that I decided not to live under the same roof with Dora and left.

The town of Kant was quite small. There were some young Polish men who had run away from Poland because of the war. There was a very handsome young man by the name of Joseph. He had told me that I could live with him. I don't know how he found out that was looking for a place to live. I thanked him, but didn't accept his offer. Instead I found a place with a Russian family.

I found a small diner in the town where you could purchase a bowl of soup and a slice of bread for very little money. However, many times they didn't have enough food to sell to everyone that wanted it. It was very disappointing to have to leave without anything to eat, especially after standing in line for a long time. While eating at the diner I met many men that were Jewish and had left Poland. The Russians didn't trust them enough to let them join their army, so instead they were mobilized to work in the work camps.

Many of them told their stories of how they escaped Poland before the German occupation. Since I would listen to the men telling their stories, I would often share mine. They were all very impressed that a

young girl of eighteen would be able to travel on foot so far, in hunger and cold and with the added danger of being discovered of being Jewish.

Most of the men were interested in what I had to say, especially Wiktor Fiszlewicz. He asked me again and again to tell him what I had gone through. Then he told me his story. He had lived in Poland all of his life and was twenty-three years old. Although when the war had started on September 1, 1939, he was twenty-one. He had come to Russia to escape the Germans, since it was the only place that he could run to. He had left behind his young parents that were in their forties, three brothers, and two sisters.

While in Russia the Polish people had difficulty buying food in the stores because the shelves were empty. The Polish people complained and said that as long as they had the money to buy the food in Poland, that it was always available. The Russian Government found out about their complaints. They put up posters which stated that if they didn't like it in Russia they could be sent back to Poland. All that they were required to do was merely register by giving their name and address. Soon the police came for these people. They were put into cattle cars and instead sent to Siberia. They had to work very hard, and live in cold barracks. Their food consisted mainly of mushrooms that were infested with worms. They had to cut large trees by using an ax. Many people died from many types of diseases, like dysentery and scurvy. Many of the people suffered from frozen toes and ears.

Wiktor was one the Polish citizens that had gone to Siberia. After two years he and the others were released. He came back to the town of Kant, where I was still living. After a short time, we were married. After the war we moved back to Poland. He found out that his parents, brothers, and sisters had been killed by the Nazis. Their crime was that of being born Jewish.

I found out after the war my sister Cima had died. The Red Cross to whom I had written to inquiring about her didn't know how she had died. My brother Samson, had been killed while fighting in the war. We were able to locate sister Kune. We took her with us to Poland. She got married and had three sons. She moved to Israel with her family in 1953. She died in Israel in 1990.

My husband and our three children, Marek, Berek, and Dina moved to the United States in 1964. We bought a dry cleaning business and worked very hard for twelve years. Wiktor was sick for four years, and died in 1979. In 1987 after being widowed for eight years, I married Sidney Frischer. We moved to San Diego, California where we are presently living.